

# BUSH ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY – OR LACK THEREOF – BACKFIRES

**“ . . . the administration [is] alarmingly out of touch with the public on energy and environmental issues . . . ” (NYT, 6/23/01)**

It's been a bad few weeks for President George W. Bush when it comes to his environmental policy - or lack thereof. Recent polls show a majority of Americans disapprove of the way he's handling environmental issues. In the Congress, Bush lost three key votes relating to his energy plan and its negative impact on the environment. That prompted a torrent of editorials critical of Bush's approach. And while traveling in Europe, Bush was met by large protests criticizing his stance on the Kyoto protocol and other environmental initiatives.

## **The Poll**

A recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll shows the President's approval rating has dropped to 53 percent, down seven points from March. Even more telling, most respondents say they disagree with the President's positions on the environment and energy. (NYT, 6/21/01)

Specifically, 46% disapprove of how President Bush is handling the environment compared to 39% who approve. Bush's handling of the energy situation garnered a 55% disapproval rating compared to 33% who approve. *The New York Times* says this “. . . shows a White House increasingly and alarmingly out of touch with what Americans are thinking.” (NYT, 6/21/01)

In another indication Bush is out of step with Americans, when asked whether it's more important to protect the environment or produce energy, the majority of respondents (55%) said protect the environment while 39% said produce energy. At the same time most think Bush believes just the opposite. Seventy-one percent (71%) said Bush cares more about producing energy than protecting the environment. (NYT, 6/21/01)

Even worse for Bush, most Americans are “suspicious” of his administration's close ties to Big Oil. “Nearly two-thirds of Americans, including a plurality of Republicans, say that Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney are too beholden to oil companies, and that they are more likely to formulate policies that favor the industry.” (NYT, 6/21/01)

Bush is also way out in right field when it comes to global warming. A whopping 72% said he needs to take immediate steps to address the problem and more than half believe the United States should honor the Kyoto protocol. (NYT, 6/21/01)

## **Bush Legislative Losses**

Members of Congress, including many Republicans, also think Bush's energy-at-the-expense-of-the-environment approach is short-sighted and off-target. Recently, the House handed Bush a stinging rebuke in the form of three environment-related legislative defeats pertaining to his energy plan.

This effort was led by a united Democratic caucus and attracted dozens of moderate Republicans who bucked their president to vote with the Democrats. The President's defeats happened in rapid succession during consideration of the Interior Department appropriations bill and prompted the *New York Times* to conclude: "The House of Representatives has now provided further evidence of the widening gap between the Bush administration and the American people on environmental and energy issues." The *Times* also said: "In legislative terms, it was Mr. Bush's darkest hour." (NYT, 6/23/01)

The votes were as follows:

H. AMDT. 106: This amendment, sponsored by Representative Nick J. Rayhall, blocks Bush plans for new oil, gas and coal exploration within the boundaries of national monuments. The amendment passed 242 to 173 with 47 Republicans jumping ship to vote with the majority. According to *The New York Times*, Bush and Secretary Norton "had cast covetous eyes" on the monuments as a source of fossil fuels. (NYT, 6/23/01) In arguing for this amendment, Rep. Rayhall said: "Our national heritage must not be sacrificed on the altar of greed and profits." (The Washington Post, 6/22/01)

H. AMDT. 107: Rep. Jim Davis sponsored this amendment which prevents oil and gas drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico (known as Lease Sale 181) off the Florida coast. President Bush wanted to drill there while his brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, opposed the idea. The vote was 247 to 164 in favor of the ban with 70 Republicans voting for the amendment. Rep. Davis said: "We are against quick fixes to solve our energy problems. We don't want to see oil drilling off the coast." (The Washington Post, 6/22/01)

H. AMDT. 108: This amendment, authored by Rep. Jay Inslee, prevents the Department of Interior from suspending or revising rules (3809 regulations) requiring mining companies clean up after themselves. Specifically, the rules say mining companies must "pay for the full cost of environmental cleanups on federal land. The regulations also impose strong environmental standards to protect ground and surface water from mining pollution. . . ." Another key provision in the rules allows the federal government wide latitude to deny permits for mines that "pose a serious environmental threat." (The Washington Post, 6/22/01) The amendment passed 216 to 194 with 28 Republicans joining the Democratic majority.

## **Editorial Writers Take Aim**

After the House action to stem the Bush anti-environmental tide, editorial writers at newspapers throughout the country highlighted the impact of the House votes and Bush's environmental policy failures. Here are some excerpts:

"The House of Representatives has now provided further evidence of the widening gap between the Bush administration and the American people on environmental and energy issues . . . The House is clearly eager to restore balance to Mr. Bush's strategy . . . It also wants Mr. Bush to know that his administration's dismissive approach to the nation's natural resources reflects a grievous misreading of the public temper." (NYT, 6/23/01)

"President Bush has received some warnings from members of his own party who are concerned about his zeal to drill for new sources of oil and gas. For anyone concerned about the environment, these actions are most welcome . . . When will the Bush administration get the message?" (The Bergen County Record, 6/26/01)

"The Bush administration has come in with a slew of policies that show a callousness toward precious natural resources. President Bush never saw a national park that he thought wouldn't look better with an oil rig in it. Vice President Cheney believes energy conservation is for wimps. (The Atlanta Constitution, 6/24/01)

"The defeat for Bush is the latest, loudest signal that his administration is seriously out of step with the nation regarding resource questions . . . Yet the administration plows ahead with its plundering policies . . . Bush can continue to talk like an environmentalist while acting like a developer. The public isn't buying it. Last week's House vote suggests that many Republicans aren't, either." (The Vancouver, Washington Columbian, 6/25/01)

## **Mr. Bush Goes to Europe**

Bush also took a lot of heat over his environmental policies during his first trip as president to Europe. At almost every stop Bush was greeted by thousands of sign-waving, chanting protestors. In Madrid, they surrounded the American embassy and denounced Bush's inaction on global warming. (UPI, 6/12/01) In Brussels, members of Greenpeace unfurled a large banner reading: "President W. Bush wanted for crimes against the planet." (AP, 6/13/01) In Goteborg, Sweden Bush was greeted by an estimated 10,000 protestors and a banner declaring him the "Toxic Texan." (The Seattle Times, 6/15/01)

European leaders also had sharp words for Bush. Here's a sampling:

"You can only have a global solution to a problem if there is a global commitment. We understand the United States is committed to action, but it is not committed to the sort of action we think is essential." - Christ Patten, European Union Minister for External Affairs

"I very much regret that he is sticking to his rejection of the Kyoto treaty without naming concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the United States." - Juergen Trittin, Germany's Environmental Minister

"Abandoning the Kyoto Protocol would mean postponing international action to combat climate change for years and we are already late." - Kjell Larsson, Swedish Environmental Minister

"We have scientists here in Europe. I think that we have won at least one or two Nobel prizes." - Guy Deleuz, Belgian Environmental Minister

The European press had a field day with Bush too:

"Bush has looked for an opening concerning the environment, and suggested new negotiations on a new treaty on emissions. It is mostly a show for the galleries." - Aftonbladet Daily, Sweden

"The house is burning. And what is the American President doing? He's going to the library to read up on how hot the fire can get," - Der Tagesspiegel, Germany

(All quotes from AP, 6/13/01)

## **Special Interest Secrecy**

In a late-breaking development on the Bush environment and energy front, Vice President Cheney has again refused a GAO request to release the list of people who met with his energy task force this spring. The GAO probe was prompted by a request by Reps. Waxman and Dingell. (NYT, 6/26/01) Rep. Waxman says: "The Cheney task forces's refusal to provide basic information about its interactions with nongovernmental entities and individuals raises serious questions about the access large donors have to the policymaking process in the Bush administration." (The Washington Post, 6/19/01) If Cheney continues to refuse to release the names, the GAO may issue a "demand letter" and if that doesn't work civil action is possible. (NYT, 6/26/01)

## **Conclusion**

Seven months into his presidency, George W. Bush is beginning to pay a hefty price for his special interest, anti-consumer approach to energy at the expense of the environment. Polls show Americans are losing faith in Bush and think his environmental policies are backwards. On his first trip to Europe, Bush was blasted for his stance on the Kyoto Protocol and inaction on global warming. And once he returned home, the Bush energy plan fell prey to three bi-partisan defeats in the House of Representatives - all relating to the negative environmental impacts of the plan. The American people have spoken, their elected leaders have spoken and the world has spoken - Bush is all wrong when it comes to his environmental policy.